

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 380 862

EA 026 569

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TITLE Systemic Restructuring: Essential Leadership Factors for Successful Inclusive Schools.
PUB DATE Oct 94
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the University Council for Educational Administration (Philadelphia, PA, October 28-30, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; Collegiality; Disabilities; *Educational Cooperation; Elementary Education; *Inclusive Schools; *Leadership; *Leadership Styles; Mainstreaming; *Organizational Climate; Organizational Development; Parent Role; Program Development; School Districts; *School Organization
IDENTIFIERS *Colorado

ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a study that examined the leadership factors that emerged during the planning and implementation of a neighborhood schooling program for special education students with mild and moderate handicapping conditions in 12 schools in an urban school district in a community in the southwestern United States. Leadership is defined as a reciprocal, multidirectional, noncoercive influence that involves multiple leaders and followers within a system. Methods involved: (1) surveys of 244 teachers and support staff in 11 of the 12 elementary schools, follow-up surveys in all 12 buildings, and a parent survey; (2) interviews with 11 principals, parent leaders, central office administrators, and the new district superintendent; (3) the development of a teacher focus group; and (4) observation of parent groups and administrators. It is recommended that teachers utilize a trainer-of-trainees model, formalize team building and decision-making structures, and develop individual school plans for communicating issues of inclusion. Principals should offer ongoing structured collegial support and professional-development opportunities and provide specific skills and knowledge training. It is advised that central office administrators be included on building teams and participate in the daily reality of the schools. (LMI)

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ED 380 862

**SYSTEMIC RESTRUCTURING:
ESSENTIAL LEADERSHIP FACTORS FOR
SUCCESSFUL INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS**

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Paper Presented at the Annual Convention of the University Council for
Educational Administration (UCEA), Philadelphia, PA, October 28-30, 1994

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Abstract

This paper describes various leadership and implications which have emerged during a study of the planning and implementation of a neighborhood school program for special education students with mild and moderate handicapping conditions in an urban school district. Based upon data gathered during the first eighteen months of a three-year qualitative study of the planning, transition, and refinement process, this paper discusses critical factors affecting the process. A brief description of the broader study is provided, including the various data-gathering and analysis techniques utilized. Working theories about essential leadership factors are presented based upon a definition of leadership as a reciprocal, multidirectional, noncoercive influence involving multiple leaders and followers within a system. Emergent management issues are also discussed. Questions which will be addressed during the next stages of this study are presented.

SYSTEMIC RESTRUCTURING: ESSENTIAL LEADERSHIP FACTORS
FOR SUCCESSFUL INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

Redefining Leadership

Evolving Definitions

Definitions of leadership have evolved over the years. Early descriptors relied upon traits of selected individuals who were placed in positions of authority and who led others toward achievement of successful attainment of organizational goals (Bass, 1981). Later definitions included behavioral descriptions, relationship patterns, and personality profiles (Gardner, 1990). More recently a broader definition of leadership, one which includes individuals beyond those traditionally given positions of power by the organization, has emerged as organizations have begun to implement collaborative decision making processes and as the culture of such organizations has shifted to accommodate a new management paradigm with accompanying new organizational vision (Guzmán, 1988; Senge, 1990; Rost, 1991). It is clear in leadership and school literature that this definition is in evolution.

Changing Relationships

Through the process of creating a common purpose and focusing

collective energy toward desired outcomes, appointed leaders often encounter fear and resistance to change (Guzmán, 1994). Often such resistance comes on the heels of influence having been exercised in a coercive manner rather than persuasively, allowing followers to freely agree or disagree with an emerging purpose (Rost, 1991). If this is true, the relationship has most likely been developed in a traditional unidirectional manner.

Collaboration in leadership, which includes stakeholders from all levels of an organization or community, is now widely recognized as critical to achieving results. Making decisions by consensus within groups is becoming more commonplace (Oakley and Krug, 1991). Barriers to full collaboration, however, often stem from unrecognized sources that emerge from within or without the system, including role confusion, communication gaps, power differentials, or inability to move beyond self interest. Further complications can arise from various perspectives on what constitutes the common good within a given community (Guzmán, 1994).

Joseph Rost (1991) suggests in his provocative challenge to traditional paradigms of leadership that four essential elements must be

present if leadership exists in a situation: 1) the relationship is based on multidirectional, noncoercive influence; 2) more than one leader and followers are actively involved in unequal influence patterns; 3) they intend several real (substantive and transforming) changes; and 4) together they develop mutual purposes which become common purposes. His theories are supported by others who write about shifts in the paradigm of leadership (Astin & Leland, 1991; Wheatley, 1992; Guzmán, 1994).

A Study of Neighborhood Schooling

Background of the Study

In spring 1993 a research study was initiated during the first stages of transition to a neighborhood schooling philosophy and structure in the 12 elementary schools of an urban school district in a community in the southwestern United States. The study was to be conducted as one piece of a larger evaluation process in a collaborative effort between school district administration and university professors.

At the time the study was launched the subject school district had a student population of 10,704 -- 5886 were elementary aged students in grades K-5 and of those students 578 were identified as handicapped.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine, describe, and analyze various leadership factors which might emerge during the planning and implementation of a neighborhood schooling program for special education students with mild and moderate handicapping conditions in the school district. Specific research questions to be investigated were listed as:

1. What building principal behaviors, attitudes, and roles exist surrounding the planning and implementation of neighborhood schooling?
2. Does teacher leadership emerge during the implementation, what form does any emergent leadership take, and what is the system's response to any such teacher leadership?
3. Does parent leadership emerge during the implementation, what form does any emergent leadership take, and what is the system's response to any such parent leadership?
4. What factors in central administrative leadership exist?
5. What theories about leadership emerge within the context of the study?

Research Design

This study, which will continue until fall 1995, is based upon a qualitative research design. Because this study was designed and intended to be primarily exploratory and descriptive in nature (Miles and Huberman, 1994), the research process was not rigidly structured in the beginning to allow it to be modified as necessary depending upon the direction suggested by data generated. Early design predicted that primary data sources would be: 1) structured interviews; 2) unstructured interviews; 3) written surveys; 3) reflective teacher journals; 4) district documents; and 5) observations. Primary subjects would be: 1) elementary school principals; 2) elementary school teachers; 3) central office special education administrators; and 4) the parents of students who transferred to a neighborhood school from district "centered" programs for students with specific handicapping conditions.

The study was designed to utilize various data sources and data gathering techniques which would serve as triangulation to allow for greater validity and reliability in the study (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984; Patton, 1987). The researcher was accepted by the district as a participant observer and primary researcher for the duration of the study.

Building Principals

Structured personal interviews were conducted in April 1993 and May 1994 with elementary school principals. Eleven of twelve principals participated in the interviews. First-year data were analyzed and provided preliminary direction for the next stages of the study, including the content of the written teacher surveys.

Teachers

In May 1993 a written survey was conducted among teachers and support staff in eleven of twelve elementary schools; 244 responses were received. In May 1994 a follow-up written survey was conducted among teachers and support staff in all twelve buildings; 244 responses were received from this survey as well.

Based upon these data and data gathered early in the study, a teacher research group was formed. This group is comprised of ten volunteers who are teachers and support personnel in elementary schools within the district. This group was given training and information about action research, observation techniques, group process, organizational development, and communication. They have served as a focus group for data clarification and kept reflective journals based upon their

observations relevant to neighborhood schooling during the 1993-94 school year.

Parents

Informal observation of parent groups and unstructured interviews with selected parent leaders have been conducted. In May 1993 a written survey was distributed to parents whose children were being affected by the transition. Data provided was insufficient to support theory generation, therefore another survey is not planned. This piece of the study has been the most obscure and will be redesigned as other data are analyzed and provide further direction.

Central Office Administration

Unstructured interviews and informal observations have been conducted with key central office administrators to determine the sequence of historical events, underlying rationale for the project, the evolution of plans, and program expectations. A review of pertinent district documents has also occurred.

A change in the superintendency of this district has been key to subsequent events. An executive expectation that Total Quality Education (TQE) become a district-wide process has been presented. The subsequent

implementation of initial team building training has provided preliminary structure for this transition. This shift brings with it implications for the future of building-level teams, collaborative decision making, professional dialogue and planning, team building, and skill acquisition. A lengthy informal interview was held with the new superintendent shortly after he took office.

Data Analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that while researchers possess the human skills necessary for finding meaning in the world by organizing and interpreting information, the critical question as to whether the meanings found in qualitative data are valid, repeatable, and right must be answered. They suggest several tactics, based upon their own work and the work of other expert qualitative researchers, for generating meaning from data and arranging them from the descriptive to the explanatory and from the concrete to the more conceptual and abstract. They offer the following which begin by helping the analyst see which data goes with what, moving the analysis toward identifying what is available, sharpening understanding and differentiating among pieces of data, seeing abstract relationships, and assembling a coherent understanding of the

data. The tactics are: 1) noting patterns and themes; 2) seeing plausibility; 3) clustering; 4) making metaphors; 5) counting; 6) making contrasts/comparisons; 7) partitioning variables; 8) subsuming particulars into the general; 9) factoring; 10) noting relations between variables; 11) finding intervening variables; 12) building a logical chain of evidence; and 13) making conceptual/theoretical coherence (pp. 246-262). It is important to note that these tactics are not intended to be implemented in a linear pattern but are used as the data dictates.

Tactics for testing or confirming findings are suggested in the same work (Miles and Huberman, 1994) and have come from the same experience and research origins. Implementation of these tactics allow for confirmation of data quality, understanding non-patterns, testing explanations, and reality testing. These tactics are: 1) Checking for representativeness; 2) checking for researcher effects; 3) triangulating; 4) weighing the evidence; 5) checking the meaning of outliers; 6) using extreme cases; 7) following up surprises; 8) looking for negative evidence; 9) making if-then tests; 10) ruling out spurious relations; 11) replicating a finding; 12) checking out rival explanations; and 13) getting feedback from informants (pp. 262-287).

Data analysis in this study has utilized selected data analysis tactics from those listed herein and continues to develop as new data sets are added to the growing body of information. Data analysis is not complete at this time, although working theories have emerged and are being validated through the further implementation of various analysis tactics.

Data Implications

While it would be premature to provide specific conclusions at this juncture, several implications have emerged from the data analysis which are relevant to the evolution of the neighborhood schooling project and which serve as foundational to the leadership implications presented later. These implications will be further refined through the next stages of the study.

Instruction

Addressing the needs of students with more severe handicapping conditions (i. e. physical, emotional/behavioral, or multiple) within regular classroom settings is a primary concern of classroom teachers and principals. As a related issue, addressing the needs of "typical" students within the context of an inclusive classroom is a major concern

for that same group.

Broader societal shifts appear to be adding complexity to the regular classroom beyond the relatively few handicapped students who have returned to home schools. Classroom teachers do not differentiate in their concerns among students who were sent "back" to a neighborhood schools and those who arrive in their classrooms with behavioral or learning problems.

Resources

Providing specific instructional skill training for classroom teachers, based upon the needs of a more diverse student population, has emerged as a need in data from teachers, principals, and central office administrators. An expectation that central office personnel provide skill training, clearer direction for implementation, and additional resources (teachers, specialists, equipment, and supplies has emerged from building data.

Communication

While district administrators purposely called this restructure "neighborhood schooling" to avoid concerns from staff and parents about forced full inclusion, a language shift appears to be occurring from the

exclusive use of the term "neighborhood schooling" to the interchangeable use of the term "inclusion." There appears to be no differentiation between the two terms among subjects in the schools.

Dialogue in schools appears to be focused upon student needs, issues of adult communication, adult roles and relationships, time and resource management, and accountability for outcomes. There appears to be no common understanding among groups as to what would constitute successful implementation of neighborhood schooling beyond the inclusion of students with special needs in regular classrooms.

Decision Making

While philosophical acceptance for the underlying rationale of the neighborhood schools transition appears at all levels, practical day-to-day issues remain as a concern. Overall, teachers believe they have no control over their professional lives in the matter of neighborhood schooling and dealing with increased numbers of students with special needs, whether identified as handicapped or not.

Implementation appears to be affected by relationships and structures in place within each school prior to the transition. For instance, some schools have clearer lines of communication and building

policies around the issues of students with behavioral problems.

Additionally, some buildings appear to have more responsive internal structures in place through which to address emerging student and classroom teacher needs.

Emerging Theories

Several theories are emerging through the integration of data from the various strands of the study. These transitional theories will provide focus and direction for the next stages of the project.

1. Societal shifts and increasing needs of the general school population affect classroom dynamics, teacher concerns, and administrative expectations.
2. The history of communication systems, networks, and practices within each building affects the dialogue relative to the inclusion of specific students within classrooms and the responsiveness of the instructional team to students.
3. Reconciliation of philosophical beliefs with the pragmatics of daily classroom and school life is important to teachers and principals.
4. A common understanding of what constitutes "successful

implementation" is important to the success of the restructuring effort.

5. A sense of efficacy through power in making decisions, acquisition of requisite skills, on and having adequate resources to address student needs is important to principals and teachers.

Leadership Factor Theories

The evolution of the following theories has taken place over the life of the study and is based upon the definition of leadership presented earlier in this paper. These theories are expected to evolve further as the data are analyzed and expanded.

Teachers

1. Skill training focused upon responding to students with special needs (beginning with behavioral challenges) for classroom teachers, utilizing a trainer of trainers model would provide a forum for stimulating professional dialogue, a greater sense of efficacy in the classroom, and an opportunity for leadership to emerge.
3. Formalizing team building and decision-making structures in

all buildings, based upon the district's move to a TQE model, might develop a greater sense of efficacy, create opportunities for teacher leadership to grow, and offer an available avenue for revision and refinement of the neighborhood schooling building and district models.

4. Developing a plan and structure at each school to provide for communication around issues of inclusion. Included in that plan might be: group norms, dealing with conflict and stress, clarifying and addressing specific needs, roles and relationships of adults, building a philosophy of addressing a diverse population, reconciling reality with philosophy.

Principals

1. Offering ongoing structured collegial support and professional development opportunities for building principals could provide for stronger building-level leadership teams to be developed. Areas around which those opportunities might be built would include: group norms, community and team building, dealing effectively with conflict, stress management, facilitating roles and relationships among adults,

building philosophy for addressing diverse populations, and reconciling reality and philosophy.

2. Providing specific skill and knowledge-based training for building principals around issues of students with special needs would allow for greater credibility in buildings and could develop a foundation for more effective curriculum planning at the building level.

Central Office Administration

1. Including central office administration on building teams for development of curriculum and structural modifications would develop a greater sense of district community, promote the total quality efforts of the superintendent, and increase communication and understanding of the common purpose among all players.
2. Developing a plan whereby central office administration can become more grounded in the daily reality of schools would improve communication, break down barriers, and increase the sense of efficacy for all players.

Next Steps

The study is intended to continue through fall 1995. Data gathered in the spring of 1995 will be for the purposes of clarifying and validating working theories and further addressing the research questions. The issue of parent leadership has been elusive and will be focused upon further in the next stages of the study.

Focus group interviews, site visitations, individual interviews, and further document analysis will be utilized in the final stages of this study. The researcher will continue as a participant observer and will utilize the data analysis tactics listed herein to ensure the reliability and validity of emerging theories and conclusions. A final report to the district will be submitted in the fall of 1995.

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